Met Office

NEWS

Can hay fever really spread from person to person?

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A fifth of us think so. We debunk popular myths around hay fever ahead of the Bank Holiday weekend.

You can now get pollen 'push' notifications via the Met Office mobile app to alert you when the pollen count is moderate or above to help sufferers manage their condition.

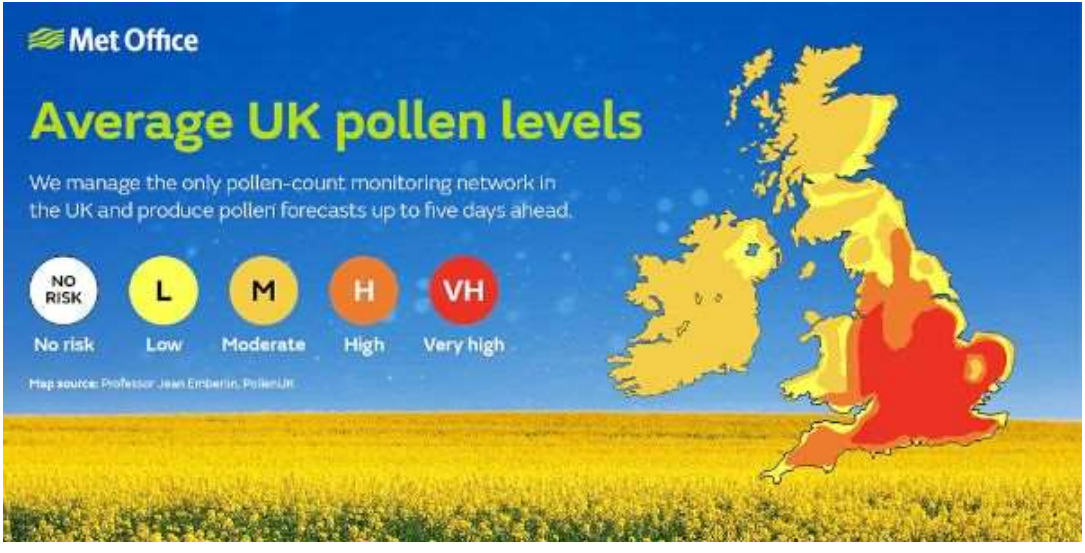
We all like to think they know a thing or two about the weather, but when it comes to awareness about pollen allergies, knowledge levels are surprisingly low, according to a new survey from the Met Office.

In a poll of 2,000, a fifth admitted they didn't realise that a runny nose and the sniffles were common symptoms of hay fever. Even more amazingly, a fifth also showed they were equally uncertain about how hay fever is caused, believing it is transmitted from one person to another like the common cold.

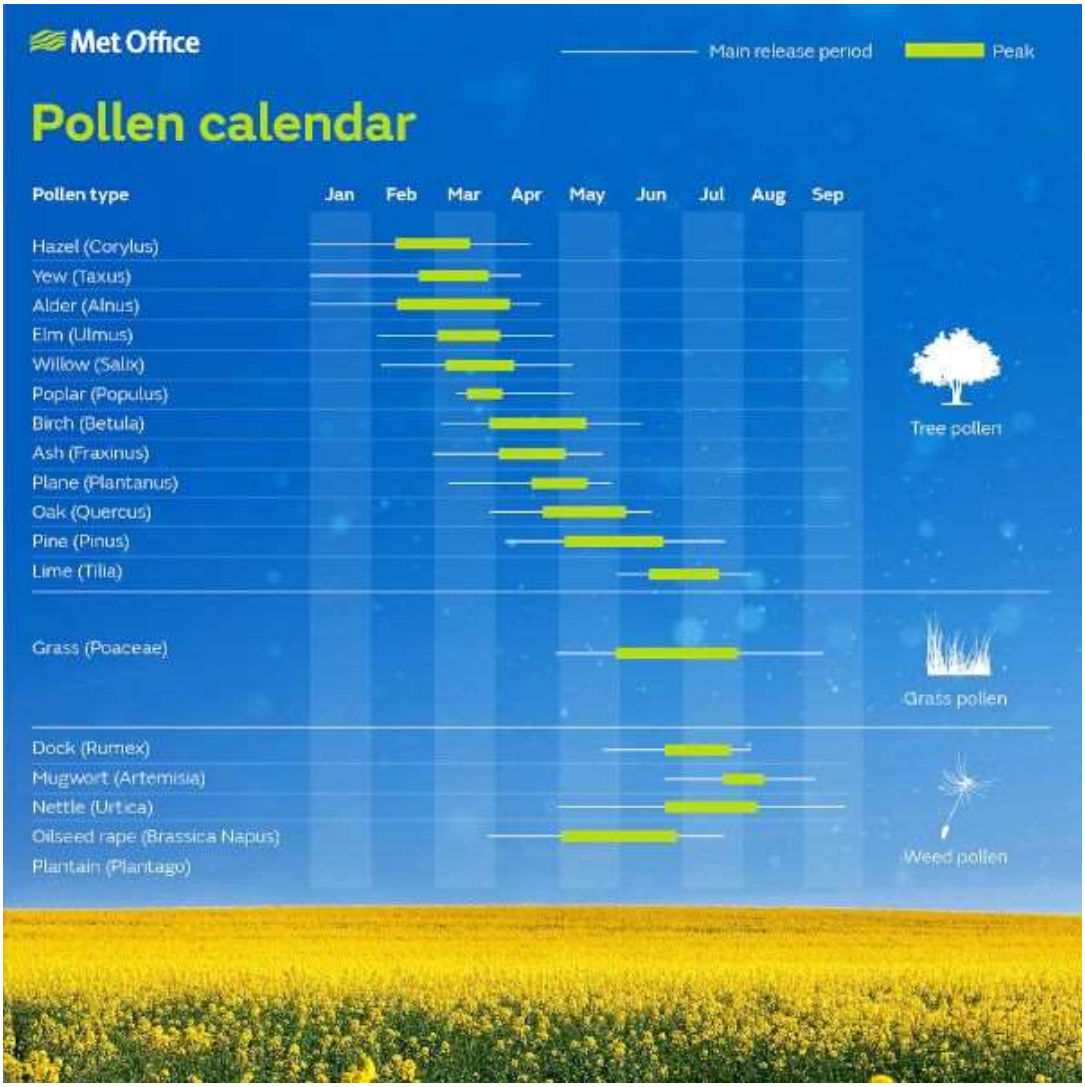
When asked how best to deal with hay fever, 1 in 5 said it was best to keep all windows open to let clean air in, with another 20% claiming that symptoms will 'worsen' if they stayed indoors. When asked to identify the main types of pollen in the UK, many identified bogus allergens as being real. A third (32%) identified 'bird' and 'farm' pollen as legitimate allergens, with a fifth identifying 'bee' pollen as another type. In reality, tree, grass and weed are the three main types of pollen in the UK – each with its own season from January to November.

We have joined forces with Lloyds Pharmacy to provide guidance on how hay fever sufferers can stay ahead of potential symptoms this bank holiday weekend.

Francesca Brenca, Pharmacist at Lloyds Pharmacy, comments: “It’s remarkable how little is still known about hay fever, particularly as millions of people now suffer from pollen allergies in the UK. That said, we know that symptoms can be deeply unpleasant for sufferers once they begin. The Met Office’s pollen network and forecast is critical in helping us identify when increased pollen levels are going to occur, which in turn, helps us provide information to our customers that suffer from pollen allergies and ensure our stock of relevant tablets and other remedies are available to ease those symptoms.”



The Met Office’s Yolanda Clewlow, Manager of the UK pollen network, comments: “In conjunction with the National Pollen and Aerobiological Research Unit, we operate the only UK-wide pollen network, providing expert daily pollen forecasts to help hay fever sufferers prepare against potential allergic reactions. New to our mobile app are pollen ‘push’ notifications, which alerts users every morning when the pollen count is moderate or higher. This helps hay fever sufferers to respond accordingly by taking medication or modifying their exposure to pollen, helping to manage their condition before symptoms even begin.”



What other bizarre myths exist around pollen and hay fever in the UK?

A spoonful of honey a day will keep hay fever at bay

- 61% think this is true.
- The belief is that a spoonful of honey helps desensitise you to pollen; however, there is no scientific evidence to support this.

A pescetarian diet will help reduce symptoms of hay fever

- 80% said this was blatantly false but it may actually be true.
- A recent study by the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition suggests that a diet rich in Omega-3 is associated with reducing symptoms. Perhaps not a cure, but potentially worth trying.

Tree pollen dispersal is highest when it rains

- 40% think this is true.
- Tree pollen season traditionally lasts from late March to mid-May and during this time, if it rains, it's good news for hay fever sufferers as this lessens the chance of

dispersal for this type of pollen. Conversely, rain can worsen pollen levels during grass pollen season (mid-May to July) so it's not always a good thing.

There are only 10 types of pollen in the UK that cause hay fever

- 80% think this is true but it is false.
- There are 30 different types of pollen in the UK, with the main three being tree (mid-March to end of May), grass (mid-May to July) and weed (end of June to September).

Pollen can affect your mood and personality

- Some have claimed this is the case and it might possibly be true.
- According to the International Journal of Child Health and Human Development, high pollen levels can affect anxiety levels in people with recurrent mood disorders, such as bipolar.

There is more pollen in the countryside than urban area

- Many believe that this would be the case but it is false.
- Urban areas tend to have lower pollen counts than the countryside, but pollen can combine with air pollution in the city centre and bring on hay fever symptoms. It's not just in the summer months either; it can peak as early as April and May.

The pollen count is measured by a society of bee keepers who record the number of bees pollinating plants in their local area

- Astonishingly, 36% thought this was genuine but it is false.
- The pollen count is literally the amount of pollen per cubic metre observed over 24 hours. There are various expert monitoring sites across the UK which measure pollen between March and September.

How to combat hay fever this weekend, as advised Lloyds Pharmacy:

1. The first thing to do is check the Met Office's pollen forecast to check if the pollen count is going to be high before you go out: www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/pollen-forecast.
2. Keep windows closed when at home and overnight. Most pollen is released in the early morning and falls to ground level in the evenings when the air cools.
3. When outdoors, wear sunglasses to keep pollen out of your eyes. Hay fever sufferers can experience itchy eyes when coming into contact with pollen spores.
4. Avoid drying your clothes outside when pollen counts are high. If you do, shake items before bringing them inside.

5. Keep car windows closed when driving and fit a pollen filter to reduce the impact of pollen grains.
6. When indoors, there are a number of useful tips to reduce the impact of hay fever symptoms such as: vacuuming regularly, avoid bringing fresh flowers indoors, and be aware that pets can bring pollen in on their fur.
7. Don't allow smoking in the house as this will irritate the lining of your nose, eyes, throat and airways, making your hay fever symptoms worse.
8. After being outside, shower and wash your hair to remove pollen.

If you suffer from hay fever and want to check if the pollen count is high, why not check out the Met Office's dedicated pollen forecast (www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/pollen-forecast). To receive pollen 'push' notifications, download the Met Office mobile app and receive automatic updates on the latest pollen count when its moderate or higher (download from the iOS App store or the Google Play store).

About the research:

Research conducted by Atomik Research on April 22 among 2,000 people living in the UK – 1,000 with hay fever sufferers and 1,000 general populous.

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